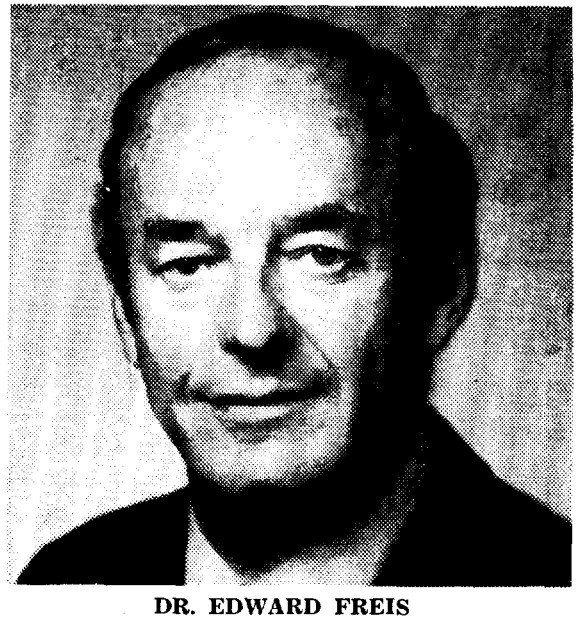
Lasker Medical Prize Given to Area Doctor

Dr. Edward D. Freis of the Veterans Administration Hospital here today won the $10,000 Albert Lasker award for clinical medical research.

Freis, 59, has spent most of his professional career studying hypertension (high blood pressure). The award is being made in recognition both of his studies proving that even mild hypertension can lead to heart failure, stroke and kidney disease if allowed to persist, and of his concurrent demonstration that such dangers can be minimized by the routine administration of corrective drugs.

In awarding the prize to Freis, Mrs. Lasker, president of the Albert and Mary Lasker Foundation in New York, and Dr. Michael E. DeBakey, who headed the selection jury, noted that hypertension affects almost 23 million Americans and is a leading cause of the strokes that kill 200,000 people a year and disable many more.



DR. EDWARD FREIS

Opportunity Cited

For this reason, the citation accompanying the prize noted that Dr. Freis has presented the nation's physicians with an opportunity to practice preventive medicine capable of "saving and prolonging the lives of tens of thousands of Americans."

Interviewed after announcement of the prize, Freis said:

"Of the major chronic diseases that kill, this is the first one that we have a definitive method of dealing with. This gives us hope that we can likewise conquer the other major killers such as hardening of the arteries and cancer."

In 1964 Freis organized and conducted a 5-year study in 17 VA hospitals. Patients were matched for age and health conditions and divided into groups so that some with moderate hypertension were treated with drugs while others were not.

A Hopeful Finding

That study demonstrated for the first time that treatment for moderate hypertension can reduce the death rate for those with this condition by 50 percent, and that treatment can be 67 percent effective in preventing the complications of high blood pressure. These may include loss of memory, personality change, crippling and paralysis.

Until publication of the study, many physicians dismissed moderate hypertension as unimportant in the mistaken belief that it was not dangerous. Nor did they recognize that hypertension can intensify the risk that accompanies the accumulation of fat in blood vessel walls (atherosclerosis), which itself can set the stage for heart attacks. Many doctors, says Freis, still need to be reminded of these facts.

Freis is a graduate of the Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York and has lived in the Washington area since 1949. His home is at 1201 Woodside Parkway, Silver Spring, where he lives with his wife, Willa.

Another $10,000 Albert Lasker award, this one for basic medical research was divided among three scientists whose work has been instrumental in deciphering the chemistry of heredity on the molecular level.

They are Dr. Seymour Benzer of the California Institute of Technology, Dr. Charles Yanofsky of Stanford University in Palo Alto, California and Dr. Sydney Brenner, a member of the Medical Research Council unit at the University of Cambridge in England.

The three were recognized for their separate demonstrations that "there are hundreds of different sites within the gene where mutation takes place."

In layman's language this means that the scientists have spelled out in precise chemical terms some of the cell characteristics that give rise to normal and abnormal proteins. Such studies have deepened scientific understanding of the genetic code.

These contributions have shed light on the mechanisms responsible when children are born with such inherited illnesses as hemophilia, sickle cell anemia or certain forms of mental retardation. Such understanding, in turn increases the likelihood that the treatment of such disorders will be improved.